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# Iran-Contra panel eyes minor players

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The Iran-Contra panel shifts from stars to bit players today.

After opening with two headliners — retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Richard Secord and former National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane — the panel today will begin querying Gaston Sigur and Robert Owen, who sources said played minor but revealing roles in the affair.

It's all part of the staging of "a melodrama."

"This hearing has been structured like a German opera," said one panel staff member. "They want a big curtain raiser, then they are going to save Ollie North for the Gotterdammerung," he said. "They want everything to end in a big orgy of revelations by North."

Mr. Sigur, a National Security Council Asian expert, will be grilled on his successful efforts to solicit Contra donations from the Taiwanese government, and his relationship with Lt. Col. Oliver North, sources said.

A wider range of questions awaits Mr. Owen, a State Department consultant to Costa Rica who apparently was a critical link in the money chain from private donors to the Nicaraguan resistance that was directed by Col. North.

Mr. Owen will be testifying under limited immunity granted him by the panel in March. Sources said he will be questioned thoroughly about possible links to the CIA while operating in Costa Rica.

"He will be an interesting witness," promised one source.

Mr. Sigur is expected to testify for two or three hours beginning this

afternoon, officials said. Mr. Owen will follow. His stint under the spotlight is expected to last most of Friday.

"Secord and McFarlane were big-picture people," said the official. "Now the panel is getting into a specific area — the private fund-raising efforts of Col. North. These witnesses will address that," he said.

The broader purpose behind the order of appearance for witnesses was discussed in a memorandum written by Senate Select Committee Chief Counsel Arthur Liman several weeks before the hearing began, according to congressional sources who saw the document.

In it, Mr. Liman discussed how to arrange the witnesses to maximize public interest and to build the drama of the hearings to a climax later this summer.

"It was a very political memo," said one staff member who saw it. "It removed any doubt that this might be more an investigation than partisan politics."

Other sources agreed that the House-Senate panel is highly conscious of burning its high-profile witnesses too early in what is expected to be a summerlong hearing.

"They have a long witness list, and the testimony is going to be very repetitive," said one staff member.

The panel members also are showing a high camera awareness, staff sources said. "It's a melodrama, isn't it?" said one. "The problem was created when they organized this massive panel with 26 members of Congress, none of whom wants to give up the spotlight. The questioning has been extremely redundant."

Today, Mr. Sigur, who in 1982 be-

came the Reagan administration's senior adviser for Asian affairs, will be asked about his attempts to solicit money from Pacific nations for the Contras.

According to an April 1986 computer message from Col. North to Mr. McFarlane, Mr. Sigur raised at least \$2 million for the Contras from the government of Taiwan. Mr. McFarlane confirmed that effort during his testimony.

In the message, Col. North asked Mr. McFarlane, "Any thoughts where we can put our hands on a quick \$3-\$5 million? Gaston is going back to his friends, who have given \$2 million so far, in hopes that we can bridge things again, but time is running out, along with the money."

Taiwan sent \$2 million into Swiss bank accounts controlled by Gen. Secord for use in helping the Contras, according to published accounts.

Mr. Owen's testimony could illustrate the commingling of public and private efforts to fund the Contras, sources said.

While never actually working for the National Security Council, Mr. Owen apparently worked out of Col. North's White House office in late 1984 and early 1985, sources said.

In September 1985, he signed a \$50,000 contract with a State Department office set up to deliver \$27 million in non-military aid to the Contras. He already was acting as a secret liaison between Col. North and the Contras when U.S. aid to the rebels was banned.

In that role, he handled some of the private donations raised by Col. North and Carl "Spitz" Channell that were shipped to the Contras, sources said. Channell has pleaded guilty to defrauding the government while raising money for the Nicaraguan resistance.

Congressional foes of the administration have charged that much of the \$27 million in humanitarian aid designated for the Contras actually was used to buy arms.